

By: Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager
To: Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee – 23 May 2008
Subject: **Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme – Update**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To receive an update on the current Topic Review Programme and ways in which the Committee may consider building capacity for the future.

Current phase of the Work Programme – Spring 2008 – Autumn 2008

Alcohol Misuse Select Committee

1 (1) The Select Committee, under the Chairmanship of Mr Hirst, presented its report to the Cabinet on 17 March and to County Council on 3 April 2008. The Select Committee report was well received by both these fora. One of the appendices to the report before the County Council was a very early draft of what an action plan might look like to implement the Select Committee's recommendations. The Committee will be encouraged to note that the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Mr Gibbens, has already established a working group to take forward the recommendations of the Select Committee which has already had one meeting. The Working Group has noted the linkages with the Working Group taking forward the recommendations of the Personal, Social, Health, Education Select Committee.

(2) As part of the agreed monitoring process for Select Committee Topic Reviews an action plan will be prepared for submission to the Corporate Policy Overview Committee in September/November. The Select Committee will be re-convened in April 2009 to receive a report on the progress with its recommendations a year after it was considered by Cabinet.

(3) One of the most significant recommendations arising from the Select Committee report was the proposal to organise a conference on Alcohol Misuse before the summer recess. This Conference will take place on 10 July 2008 at the University of Greenwich, Kings Hill, West Malling. This will provide a further opportunity to launch the Select Committee report.

(4) Also worthy of note during the Select Committee process were a number of innovative practices which the Select Committee adopted. These included:-

- a) asking the Marlowe Academy in Ramsgate to facilitate a discussion session with young people to enable the Select Committee to

understand the experiences of this group of young people regarding the use and misuse of alcohol;

- b) in the final preparation of the report (before the report was published) the Select Committee ensured that all the partner organisations who had contributed to the report were brought together. At these facilitated discussions the draft recommendations of the Select Committee were discussed in detail and how these recommendations might be implemented.

(5) This process proved to be very useful for this Select Committee where the recommendations required partner organisations to take forward recommendations although they were not entirely within the gift of the County Council.

Topic Review Programme – Spring 2008 to Autumn 2008

2. (1) The Committee will recall at its meeting on 14 February it agreed the following work programme for Autumn 2007 to Spring 2008:-

- a) Accessing Democracy;
- b) Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
- c) Access to Healthcare (a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Topic Review).

(2) It was agreed that as soon as resources became available the next Select Committee, after those set out above, would be “Provision of Activities for Young People”.

(3) The Committee will be pleased to note that an additional Policy Overview Research Officer post has been added to the Overview and Scrutiny Team to support Select Committee topic reviews. Recruitment is currently underway and it is hoped to have an officer in post by July/August. This would mean that a review could be started after the summer recess.

Accessing Democracy

(4) This Select Committee agreed its terms of reference, and these have been endorsed by the Corporate Policy Overview Committee. This Select Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs Angell is currently gathering evidence. The Select Committee are using a number of methods to do this in addition to the established hearing sessions. Members of the Select Committee have carried out insight gathering exercises, using the Gateways, libraries and attending forums/meetings. They have also conducted interviews and have been asked to report back – “the rapporteur”.

(5) The Committee also had a hearing session which was undertaken using the County Council video conference facilities with Bristol Council which is the first time this conference facility has been used as part of the Select Committee process.

(6) The Select Committee is aiming to complete its evidence gathering phase by the end of June 2008.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

(7) Preparatory work for this Select Committee is almost complete and the inaugural meeting will be held in June. The Chairman Designate for this Select Committee is Mr Simmonds.

Access to Healthcare

(8) Pressure on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme is enormous. As a consequence representations have been made by the Chairman and Members of the Committee to the Leader and Chief Executive to increase the resources available to the Committee.

(9) It was been clear during recent discussions between the Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chairmen and Chief Executives of the two Primary Care Trusts across the administrative county of Kent that they would like to see this piece of work started as soon as possible. The Primary Care Trusts have indicated that they will contribute what they can with resources to assist this process.

(10) The Committee will be aware that the Committee has a dedicated Research Officer to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However the Committee are asked to note that the current postholder has recently secured a post with the Parliamentary Health Select Committee and there will therefore be a short gap whilst I recruit to this post.

Potential two year programme

3. (1) Members will recall that at the Committee's last meeting it was a difficult decision to make as to what should be the second Topic Review for the resources I had available. The decision was to support the review on Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) leaving the Provision of Activities for Young People as the next review in the programme.

Future Rail Services in Kent

(2) The Committee will recall that a decision was taken by the County Council in December 2007 to periodically review the outcomes recommendations of each Select Committee report to ascertain whether recommendations had been implemented or not.

(3) The Environment and Regeneration Policy Overview Committee agreed at its last meeting to look quickly at updating the work undertaken by the Select Committee (which included representatives of Medway Council) on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) Domestic Services.

(4) The Leader of the Council has indicated that he would welcome a piece of work being conducted by the County Council which looks at the opportunity to influence the rail providers, Government and others to ensure that the commuters of Kent are best served by the proposed services to be delivered by the train operators as well as exploiting in full the potential economic development and tourism opportunities for the County. Attached is a proposal form for a Select Committee to update the work previously undertaken on CTRL Domestic Services to ensure that the Rail Services in Kent meet the populations needs.

Operational Issues for Managing the Topic Review Programme

Programming of Topic Reviews

4. (1) The programming and refocusing the Topics which Members wish to review continues to present my Team with the biggest challenge. We still struggle to focus clearly on what the Review should cover and the potential outcomes. It is a challenge to ensure that the focus for the Reviews is not so broad that it might result in the loss of impact and added value to the County Council and the County's residents. One suggestion, which has come from the Research Officer team supporting the topic review process, is that it would be helpful if once a topic review has been agreed by the Committee that a cross-party group (say three Members could be identified to undertake, in conjunction with the Research Officer, the preparation of the Terms of Reference, the scope for the review and potential witness lists, so that the review is narrow and focussed which often for each of the Committees to achieve). In the current system the experience is that Committees spend some considerable time during the early part of the Select Committee process focussing the piece of work, whereas if this could be achieved at the outset by a small group of Members (which is then agreed by the sponsoring Policy Overview Committee), this would be overcome. As a consequence capacity could be built for undertaking more reviews.

(2) Members will be aware that the Parliamentary Select Committee Model is to look at a topic narrow and deep, rather than broad and all embracing.

Resources to deliver the Work Programme

(3) I currently have 1½ FTE Research Officers supporting the Select Committee Topic Review Programme, which will increase by 1 FTE when a new officer is recruited. In addition, I have one Research Officer whose time is dedicated entirely to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(4) As reported at the last meeting a bid was made for a graduate from the Graduate Development Programme to join the team on a 6 month placement from 1 April, unfortunately this bid was unsuccessful. It is intended to bid again for the placements starting 1 October 2008. However, there is no guarantee that this application will be successful. This placement within my Team has always been recognized as an excellent opportunity and a number of our Select Committee's have been supported from the Graduate Development Programme.

(5) In addition to the Research Officer resources, there are three Democratic Services Officers to support the Policy Overview Committee and Select Committee activities. I am submitting a business case for a further Democratic Services Officer to work specifically for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Launching of Select Committee Reports

(6) It would be helpful if a process for launching the report of the Select Committee could be agreed. Members of the Select Committee put a lot of work into producing their report and this is recognised when it submitted to Cabinet and County Council. However it is also important, especially for those witnesses who have contributed to the report, that it is launched as widely as possible so that it can have the maximum impact both internally and externally.

(7) Members are invited to discuss and come up with suggestions for how and when these reports could be launched, within resources available, to ensure that they have the opportunity to influence as widely as possible and gain the maximum benefit to the people of Kent.

Building Capacity for Policy Overview

5. (1) At the last meeting of the Committee there was discussion on the way forward for building capacity for POC's, to overcome the increasing challenge for POC's as they fully exercise their terms of reference of trying to carrying out their business effectively in 5 x one day meetings per year.

(2) This has become a particular challenge for Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee (CF&E POC) due to the size of the Directorate. The CF&E POC are due to receive a report at their next meeting which suggest setting up an IMG on Building Schools for the Future which will have an information monitoring role and report back to the POC. If this proves successful the POC may look to establish other IMG's to cover specific areas of their work

(3) The comments made by Members at this Committee are set out in the Minutes (minute 16 of today's agenda refers). As the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report is due to be published in early June it may be more appropriate for this Committee to discuss this issue along with the recommendations on Overview and Scrutiny from the CPA at your meeting on 10 September.

(4) As an interim measure which may assist Members in focusing the work of the Policy Overview Committees is to ask officers to identify which part of the Policy Overview Committees terms of reference a report is seeking to addressing. This would avoid reports being submitted which are in effect for information or to brief Members as this could be done outside of POC's meetings or in other ways.

(5) The key areas of the terms of reference which could be set out are:-

- Policy Development
- Performance Monitoring

- Responding to consultations

Recommendations

6. The Committee are requested to note:-

- a) that the Select Committee on Alcohol Misuse has presented its final report and commend it for its innovative processes which will be used where appropriate for future Select Committees
- b) the progress of Select Committee Topic Reviews, Accessing Democracy and Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- c) that the Select Committee on Provision of Activities for Young People will start its work when the new Policy Overview Research officer is in post
- d) that the dedicated Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Research Officer will shortly undertake a review into the transport aspects of 'Accessing Healthcare';
- e) that a bid for a graduate from the Graduate Development Programme offering a placement from 1 October 2008
- f) that the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager be asked to prepare a paper for the next meeting setting out a process which could be recommended to the County Council for adoption in the Constitution to launch Select Committee reports
- g) a business case be prepared for a dedicated Democratic Services Officer for the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- h) the Committees views are sought on (a) building capacity for the Policy Overview Committees and (b) the suggestion of a small group working with the research officer to focus the terms of reference for Topic Review.

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Appendix 1

ASSESSMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEW

(* - sections to be filled in by the proposer of the topic)

***Subject of Proposed Review:-**

Passenger Rail Services Select Committee

***Reason for the Review:-**

(see note 1 below)

To identify the best rail passenger services solution for Kent

***Issues to be covered by the Terms of Reference:-**

The aim of the select Committee is to identify the best rail passenger services solution for Kent, both in terms of:-

- The immediate benefits of the solution in terms of journey times and improved services to London, around Kent and to mainland Europe; and
- The long term benefits of the solution in terms of the regeneration of Kent and the impacts on the wider rail network and transport in the County.

***Scope of the review:-**

This will involve investigating the following:-

- Current proposals of the franchise holders, Southeastern, for services from December 2009 and proposed fare levels
- Forecasted effects of these proposals and whether they are robust - including whether rising general fare levels and additional premium fares on CTRL DS will prove to be a deterrent to travel by rail
- The effects the proposed services will have on the regeneration of Growth Areas and the coastal towns
- The case for new parkway stations
- The likelihood of rail heading to stations with significantly improved services and likely effects
- Access to stations forecast to attract significant rises in passenger volumes
- Current and future service proposals of Eurostar from Ebbsfleet and Ashford Stations

Witnesses past and proposed

Connex - now Southeastern

Network Rail

Rail Passengers Committee - now Passenger Focus

Union Railways - Eurostar

Other Local Authorities:-

Gravesham, Dartford, Swale, Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, Ashford, Shepway

Pfizer

Wiggins Group PLC - Infratil

Dover Harbour Board

Eurotunnel

Kent and Medway Economic Board - Kent Economic Board

Plus:-

Locate in Kent

Land Securities

Also:-

Medway Council as separate witness or in partnership?

***Purpose and objectives of the Review:-**

As above

Proposer of the review

Paul Carter

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To be completed by the Directorate/Cabinet Member(s)

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Are there any reasons why this review should not be put forward for inclusion in the work programme for 2006/07? (see note 2 below) | |
| How will the review contribute to corporate objectives and priorities? | |
| Will the review support the achievement of PSA or LAA targets? If yes, please identify targets:- | |
| Does the review need to be completed within a specific timeframe? If yes, please give details:- | |
| How will this review have an impact on KCC policy development and/or help to influence national policy? | |
| How will this review add value to the County Council and residents of Kent? | |
| Any additional comments from the Portfolio Holder/Strategic Director:- Portfolio Holder's Signature:- Strategic Director's Signature:- | |
| Contact Officer:- | Date:- |

Notes

Note 1 - Possible reasons for the review

1. Key public issue, identified by
 - Focus groups/citizens panels
 - Member contact with constituents/member surgeries
 - Contact with key representative bodies/forums
 - Media coverage – Public interest issue covered in local media
2. Issue highlighted via POC activities or previous reviews
3. Issue recommended to POC by another body e.g. another POC, Cabinet Scrutiny, Directorate, Cabinet or an external body.
4. Poor performing service i.e.:-
 - High level of complaints/dissatisfaction with service
 - Performance standards poor/below target – (evidence from PI's or benchmarking)
 - Identified through external review/inspection (OFSTED/Audit/ CPA etc)
 - Budgetary overspends
5. Key reports or new evidence published
6. County Council priority
7. Central Government priority/New Government guidance or legislation published

Note 2 - Possible reasons why a review should not be put into the next years/ next two years work

1. Issue being examined by
 - Cabinet
 - Cabinet Scrutiny
 - Officer Group
 - another internal body
 - an external body
2. It has been the subject of a topic review by other Councils from which details of best practice can be obtained.
3. New legislation or guidance expected.
4. **NB:** Before suggesting that a review should not be included in the work programme the following should be considered:-

Could consideration of this issue 'add value' without causing unnecessary duplication, for instance by:

- i) Looking at this issue in conjunction with another group,
- ii) Through appropriate timing of the topic review,
- iii) Through considering another group's findings rather than duplicating the same/or similar activity.

